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A tried and tested solution

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A close relative of mine, a Muslim gentleman who lives in a city in the State of Uttar Pradesh in India, had a huge house constructed for himself and his family. Adjoining it was another fairly big house owned by a Hindu contractor, the two being separated by a vacant plot of land. According to my relative this plot belonged to him, but his neighbour claimed that it was his. This naturally led to a dispute. The situation deteriorated to the point where the contractor saw fit to involve the local Jan Sangh elements in what should have been a private matter. When he informed them that a certain Muslim had 'seized' his land, they were naturally incensed, and one day their entire group of followers surrounded his house in a great state of agitation, shouting provocative slogans and adopting menacing attitudes. Our Muslim gentleman came out of his office, which was on the ground floor, to find out what could be the matter. He was informed that he, a Muslim, had 'seized' a piece of land belonging to their 'Hindu brother.' Besides saying this, they tried to bait him with a number of provocative remarks. In spite of all this, he showed no signs of anger, but simply asked who their leaders were. Taking only these few into his office, he requested the others to stay outside and assured them that if they would be patient, the matter would soon be settled. It being hot summer weather, he first offered them cold drinks, then began to enquire as to why they had taken it upon themselves to come to him. Their answer was again that their 'Hindu brother's land' had been usurped by him and they insisted that it be restored to its 'rightful owner'. Remaining very cool and calm, my relative pointed out that since they were all educated people, they must be aware of the fact that all matters relevant to land ownership were put down on paper and that the documents in question would be the best evidence by which to establish whom the land actually belonged to. They all agreed to this on principle. He then very humbly said, 'Any papers I have I am handing over to you, and I suggest that any papers in the contractor's possession also be handed over to you. Please then scrutinize both sets of papers, and I give you my full assurance in advance that whatever judgement you arrive at will be unconditionally accepted by me'.

At this point, the mood of the Jan Sangh's leaders underwent a remarkable change. Judging by their personal experience, they realized that the picture of this Muslim gentleman as painted by the contractor had been a false one. Upto that point they had been misguided by the contractor's wild statements, but now they began to hear the voice of their own consciences.

They came out of the office with the papers and requested the crowd to go home, telling them that 'Mian Sahib' had left the decision in their hands, and that they would finalize the matter after some 'deliberation.'

The upshot was that after a detailed study of the papers, the boundary dispute was fully settled in favour of the Muslim gentleman. This incident occurred in 1965 and many of the chief characters in this incident are still alive today. If anyone needs confirmation, I can give actual names and addresses of people who can verify this story.

Recently, when the issues of the Babari Mosque was raised, I was repeatedly reminded of this incident. It occurred to me that if only the Muslim leaders in question had been sincere and serious enough to review the facts objectively, they would have resorted to the same policy in their communal matters as my relative had adopted to solve his own personal problem. They would then have been one hundred per cent successful in the sense that matters would have been amicably settled and there would have been no future recurrence of the problems.

But whenever such untoward incidents take place, unwise Muslim leaders are immediately up in arms, and out to retaliate. The making of emotionally charged speeches and the organizing of processions along the main thoroughfares are the only solutions that their limited intelligence suggests. While this modus operandi may further the cause of their continuing leadership, so far as the solving of the actual problem is concerned, this approach is doomed to being counter-productive. An affair which, at the outset, is the concern of only a handful of people, when projected into the public arena, becomes a large-scale communal matter. Worse still, it becomes a prestige issue, and at this juncture, even the political leaders hesitate to do anything decisive, whatever little it may have been possible to do before matters escalated to this point. This is because they fear that any revolutionary step on their part may cost them, the votes of the affected party at election time.

If, on the contrary, the Muslim leaders had quietly and seriously placed this problem in the hands of well-informed, educated people in high positions of trust and had allowed them to do the decision-making on the basis of an unprejudiced analysis of historical facts, they could, following the example of our Muslim gentleman, have announced that they would unconditionally accept their decision, thereby averting the complications which ensued. But this would have taken forethought. And courage.

In the name of God

'God is great and no other is great'. This is an acknowledgment of an external reality. The words, 'I am small,' show one's preparedness to mould oneself to it. Satan knew that God was great, but he did not accept that he himself was small, and thus became a mine of evil and corruption for all time. Hitler too was aware of God's greatness, but of his own smallness he had no inkling. It was thus that he finally ranked among the most contumacious and wicked human beings of all time.

There are many people who make the same mistake and imagine that simply by taking the name of God, they themselves turn into gods. Not appreciating that there is nothing lowlier than themselves, they mindlessly enter into conflict with others, whereas their acknowledgement of God's greatness should have taken away the urge in them to fight. They hurl invective at others, whereas consciousness of the divinity of God should so fill their hearts that they should find it impossible to indulge in such abuse.

Every truth is but a shadow of itself until man discovers his own position in relation to it. To say that God is great is only half of the truth. The other half is man's acceptance in all humility, of his own lowliness.

Thinking of the consequences

A man came before the Prophet Muhammad and asked him for some advice. 'Will you heed the advice?' the Prophet asked him. The man said that he would. The Prophet said to him: 'When you decide on some action, think of its consequences. If they are good, go ahead with it: and if they are bad, refrain from it.'

The Prophet's words show that every prospective action should be weighed up according to the outcome it is likely to have. One should think before one acts: what will be the consequences of my action? If the prospects appear good one may carry on with what one is intending to do: otherwise one should rethink one's course of action. This is the Islamic method of going about things, and it was this method the Prophet taught his followers to adopt.

Generally people just take matters at their face value and rush into them without thinking. This is not the Islamic way of doing things. A Muslim should study matters carefully from every angle before deciding on a course of action. He should particularly, take note of others' probable reaction. Are people likely to stand in his way? If so, does he have the capability to overcome the obstacles they pose? Is he in a position to surmount all the hurdles which are likely to be strewn in his path, winning through to his final goal? He should consider what the psychological, social and political repercussions of his actions will be. Only if he is confident that his work will have beneficial consequences should he embark on it.

The only initiative worth taking is one which will yield positive results. If one embarks on a destructive course of action it will be oneself that suffers: therefore, one should steer clear of such actions, as any sensible person steers clear of destroying his own life.

Working together

Bees have found a way out of this difficulty. The task that they cannot perform alone, they perform by concerted action. A single bee cannot travel the long distances, or suck at the myriads of flowers needed to produce a substantial amount of honey. But what is impossible for one is possible for many, and bees make honey by working at it together.

What a laborious task the preparation of honey is. Only through continuous effort by a host of bees does this delicacy come into being. The reason for this is that there is only a minute amount of honey in one single flower. Nectar has to be collected from countless flowers for a substantial amount of honey to be produced.

At times, honey bees have to travel a cumulative distance of up to 300,000 miles in order to produce just one pound of honey. Since the life-span of a bee does not extend beyond a few months, no single bee can produce this amount in its entire life, not even if it spends every second of its life gathering juice from flowers.

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Why should there be this involved and complicated method of producing honey? Could God not have placed vast reserves of the substance in the earth, just as He has stored petrol and water under the ground? Indeed He could, but He has conceived of things in this way so that man may take heed; so that he may learn numerous lessons from this sign of nature.

In life, there are some tasks that a person can perform in a short while, on his own. But there are other tasks that cannot be performed by one person alone. The only way to perform these tasks is by adopting the method of the bees – that of combined effort.

This, however, can come about only through the self-sacrifice of individuals. People have to be patient with one another, putting other's needs before their own, thinking of the good of others rather than what they themselves desire. It is through the sacrifice of individuals that there can be such a thing as concerted effort.

Renovation of religion

When this happens, it means that grime and dust have collected on the face of true religion. Its true colours have become distorted and it is in need of restoration to its original form. When the renovation is completed, it will be revealed that religion is something quite different from what men have made it out to be.

In 1509 Michelangelo (1475-1564), painter, sculptor, architect and poet was commissioned by Pope Julian to design and paint the frescoes for the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican. The project was completed in 1512. In the 450 years that have elapsed since then, the original colours used by Michelangelo have become considerably subdued and, therefore, distorted. One reason for this was that a coating of animal glue was spread over the surface of the fresco in the 17th century to keep the plaster from flaking. This glue then collected centuries of soot from the torches used to illuminate the chapel before the advent of electricity.

Under Pope John Paul II, the Vatican has ordered restoration of the fresco. At the beginning of 1986 the first results of the cleaning work were displayed to the public. Renovation has revealed some startling things about Michelangelo's original work. The master was previously believed to have used subdued, twilight colours, but it now appears that the colours he used were so vibrant that softer lighting will be needed when the cleaning is finished in 1988. Art historians now have to revise their whole concept of the Florentine school which Michelangelo represented, for the Florentines have been considered masters of design, but not of colour. George Armstrong writes in *The Guardian Weekly* (February 16, 1986) that the axiom of Tintoretto (1518-1594) 'draw like Michelangelo, paint like Titian' – 'has been thrown off balance by the Sistine's restored colours.' The renovation, Armstrong says, has revealed "Michelangelo in a new light."

In very much the same way, the nature of true religion has become distorted over the centuries. Originally, religion is revealed by God and taught in its pure form by the prophets. Then, when it falls into the hands of ordinary men, they corrupt its true message, making it conform to their own desires. Whereas religion had originally been based on belief in the hereafter, it later became an instrument for the acquisition of worldly wealth and power. True faith, as painted by the prophets, springs from the heart, but religion in its corrupted form becomes a mere accumulation of rites and ceremonies, devoid of any true spirit. Religion in its pristine form breeds humility in its followers, fostering human unity; but when religion becomes distorted, it becomes a source of pride, with one group using it to assert their superiority over another.

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Reading between the lines

True believers, the Qur'an tells us, are those who, 'when angered, are willing to forgive' (42:37). Everyone knows the turbulence that is aroused within a person when he becomes angry with someone. This being the case, forgiveness is only possible when this turbulence is suppressed. When set against this background, the full meaning of this verse of the Qur'an becomes: When angered, they are willing to forgive, even if this means curbing their emotions and suppressing the turbulence within them.

Likewise, whenever a statement is made or an injunction laid down, some words are mentioned and some are left unmentioned. That is why we have been urged to ponder over the teachings of religion, to turn them over in our minds; in this way we are able to grasp on a deeper level what has been said, fathoming what is implicit as well as what has been explicitly stated.

When the simple words – 'Speak the truth' – are uttered, what they really mean is: 'Speak the truth, even if the truth appears harmful to yourself.' When we are commanded to "hand back your trusts to their rightful owners." (Qur'an, 4:58), the full meaning of this would be: 'Hand back your trusts to their rightful owners, however difficult it may be for you to part with them.' The same verse of the Qur'an exhorts us to "pass judgement upon men with fairness." This means that even when justice appears detrimental to our interests, we should still adhere to it.

The same applies to the words "fast," "pray," and "pay *zakat*.'" Fasting implies abstaining from food, however much we may desire to eat; prayer is worship of God, no matter what other preoccupations we may have; paying *zakat* incorporates the fuller meaning: "Pay *zakat*, however difficult it may be for you to give up your hard-earned profits." The same is true of all Islamic injunctions: in order to implement them, something has to be sacrificed; the order is laid down, the sacrifice involved is for us to infer.

We must spend in the cause of God, in spite of our attachment to our wealth. We must proclaim the word of God, in spite of the persecution that might be inflicted upon us by those we address. We must acknowledge the truth, in spite of the fact that this involves disclaiming all personal greatness. Something is written in the lines, something else between the lines. For what is written to be put effectively into practice, it has to be read along with what is in between the lines.

The lessons of history

Saint Bernard was one of those Christian priests who, during the Crusades, called upon the Christian nations to take part in the 'holy war' as a matter of sacred duty. But after a struggle which lasted for 200 years, they ultimately suffered a total defeat at the hands of the Muslims. Commenting on the crusades, Bertrand Russell writes:

Although he preached the Crusades, he did not seem to understand that a war requires organization and cannot be conducted by religious enthusiasm alone.

(A History of Western Philosophy, p. 431)

What Bertrand Russell has to say about the Christian crusaders can be applied in like manner to the Muslims of modern times, and what the Prophet Muhammad had to say on the subject so many centuries ago still rings true today:

You (Muslims) will follow in the path of past communities, and even if they had entered the hole of a lizard, you will follow suit.

Just as the Christian nations made the mistake of thinking that religious fervour was sufficient to bring them victory in the crusades, and then were virtually beaten because of their own lack of discipline, so in modern times Muslims have waged innumerable wars against their conquerors, but have achieved little thereby because their efforts lacked the cohesion brought about by discipline. They have, in fact, been defeated on every front.

This striking similarity between the thinking and behaviour of the ancient and modern peoples of the Book (i.e. peoples who possess revealed scriptures, especially the Jews and the Christians) shows how little human capacity there is for learning valuable lessons from history.

It would appear that when a nation goes into a decline, all that remains of patriotic sentiment is a kind of empty enthusiasm unsupported by wisdom. There is no seriousness, no realism in tackling the affairs of the nation and, all too often, a basic sense of responsibility is unceremoniously dispensed with: the same unbalanced approach is evinced as was prevalent amongst Christian nations at the time of the crusades. How long will it take modern Muslims to realise that they are falling into the same error?

Teacher tree

The tree-trunk forms one half of a tree and the roots the other half. Botanists tell us that there is just as much of a tree spread under the ground as there is standing above the ground. The top half of a tree can only stand erect and verdant above the ground when it is prepared to bury its other half beneath the ground. This is an example which trees show to mankind; from it, man can learn how to build solidly in his life. One philosopher puts it this way:

Root downward, fruit upward, that is the divine protocol. The rose comes to perfect combination of colour, line and aroma atop a tall stem. Its perfection is achieved, however, because first a root went down into the homely matrix of the common earth. Those who till the soil or garden understand the analogy. Our interests have so centred on gathering the fruit that it has been easy to forget the cultivation of the root. We cannot really prosper and have plenty without first rooting in a life of sharing. The horn of plenty does not stay full unless first there is rooting in sharing.

A tree stands above the ground, fixing its roots firmly beneath the ground. It grows from beneath, upwards into the air; it does not start at the top and grow downwards. The tree is our teacher, imparting to us the lesson of nature that if we seek to progress outwardly, we must first strengthen ourselves inwardly; we must begin from the base of our own selves before we can hope to build society anew.

The end of life

Masti Venkatisar Aingar, a veteran writer in Kannada language started life, not as a writer, but as a civil servant in Mysore state. After a distinguished career as an administrator, he was well qualified for ministership, but he was unfairly treated and denied the promotion he deserved. Disillusioned he went into premature retirement. It was then that he took to writing short stories and novels. With approximately 150 works to his credit, he became famous as an outstanding and prolific writer. For one of his books, *Chakaweera Rajinder*, he received the Gian Peeth award from the Indian Government, along with a prize of Rs. 1,50,000.

In an interview with Sri Dhar, which was published in *The Times of India*, on August 12, 1984, the 94-year old Mr. Masti said that although he appreciated the value of his own works and the award he had received, he was “too old to be happy.” A disappointing end, indeed, to a literary career which spanned the greater part of a century. Mr. Masti’s first book had been published in 1912, but it was not until 70 years later that he received the award which should have crowned his endeavours, but somehow, sadly, failed to do so, for the simple reason that old age had dampened his enthusiasm for material things and made him indifferent to success. He was at the climax of his career, but he was no longer in a position to appreciate it.

The same is true of most people in this world. Like Mr. Masti, everyone strives to attain something worthwhile. But sometimes it takes too long a time for human efforts to fructify, and sometimes death cuts short one’s efforts, so that there can be no culminating achievement. Far better were it then to expend one’s time and efforts in this world on preparations for the next world, where there is no question of a career being cut short – for life there is eternal, and there is no question of receiving rewards too late or not at all, for reward and punishment are given on the Day of Judgement itself. All of us are inevitably bound for the next world. That is the greatest certainty of all.

Anger and pride

The Prophet Yahya (John the Baptist) once said that anger stemmed from pride. Asked how this was, he replied: "Behold you not that people who become angry do so with those who are below them in rank; they do not become angry with those who are superior to them."

It is true to say that anger always stems from a proud mentality. Were people to become humble, they would cease to become angry.

This does not mean that humble people never become angry. Indeed they do. But their anger is short-lived. After briefly manifesting itself, it disappears without trace.

Anger which comes from pride, however, does not end until its perpetrator has humiliated the object of his anger. In his arrogance, he loses his temper with anyone who does not go along with the inflated opinion he has of himself. Any such person becomes a target for the anger and vengeance that is expressed in everything he says, everything he does. Nothing will divert him from attacking his 'detractors' until he has once again established his own feeling of superiority.

Yet all this anger, all this vengeance, is only exercised against subordinates. He does not give vent to such feelings before superiors; with those above him, he is a picture of calm and composure. Yes, all too often anger stems from pride, and such anger represents the lowest point to which a man can stoop.

Working together

In the days of the steam engine, the engine drivers had no option but to stand at close quarters to a blazing fire. It was all part of being an engine driver, and without that no train could have run. Much the same thing happens to the individuals who make things go in civic life. They are confronted by the blazing fire of their own anger at other members of society.

They rage at wrongdoers, cheats and shirkers, both real and imagined. But just as the engine driver controls both the fire which drives the engine and his own desire to escape from it. So the individual in society must tame both his own fury and a desire simply to run away from adverse situations. If a society is to hold together and function in harmony, individuals must learn to bear with those who oppose and hurt them. There is no group of people in which differences of opinion do not arise; no group in which there are never feelings of grievance and resentment. It would indeed, be unrealistic to expect that everything should be plain sailing.

How then can people live and work together? How, with seemingly irreconcilable differences between individuals, can society be welded into a cohesive whole? There is only one way: people must bury their differences and agree to disagree. But this can happen only if people react coolly and rationally in difficult situations where relations are strained and there seems no way out of the dilemma. It can happen only if people are fully aware of their responsibilities towards others, as individuals, and towards their community as a whole.

This may seem to be asking the impossible. But this is not so. Every individual does these things in the most natural way within his own domestic circle. In quite normal families, differences of opinion occur almost every day, but the bonds of love and kinship prevail and grievances all finally buried. It is in this way that a family holds together. Every home is a practical example of people agreeing to disagree.

This spirit of give and take which is a matter of instinct in a family, is something which can emerge in a community only through conscious effort on the part of its members. While it is an emotional bond that keeps families from disintegrating, it is a rational effort which cements society, constraining its members to hold together despite all differences.

From affluence to ashes

Ghanshyam Das Birla (1894-1983) was the greatest industrial magnate of modern India. He led an extremely principled life, which was the secret of his success. Starting his career with paltry resources at the age of twelve, he reached such a height of success that his family now has wider commercial interest than any other single family in India.

Mr. Birla would always rise at five in the morning, and remain engrossed in his work until 9 p.m. He led a very simple life, often cooking his own meals. He drank coffee instead of liquor, and would take nothing but water in between meals. Whether in India or abroad, he never missed his morning walk. On June 11, 1983 when he was in London, he went out after breakfast for a walk in Regent Street. After a while he felt some discomfort and informed his aides. Alarmed, they brought him back home immediately. No sooner had he reached home than he collapsed. He was taken to London's Middlesex Hospital, where he regained consciousness for a while. "What is wrong with me, Doctor?" he enquired. The doctors told him that they would be able to say within five minutes after a check-up. But he died before the doctors could complete their examination. It was Mr. Birla's wish that his last rites should be performed at the place of his death. Accordingly, he was cremated at an electric crematorium in London, and his ashes were brought to India to be scattered in the rivers of his mother country.

Mr. Birla wrote many books. The Hindi title of one of them is *Rupaye ki Kahani* (Money Story), Mr. Birla's 'Moneystory' became a story of ashes in the end.

So it is with everyone in this world. Everyone is busy recording his success story, ignorant of the fact that what awaits him at the end of his life's journey has nothing whatsoever to do with material success and has everything to do with moral accomplishment.

Keeping one's mind on tomorrow

In 1898 Lord Curzon was appointed Viceroy of India. He had two daughters. When Lady Curzon was expecting their third child, both she and her husband were hoping that it would be a boy. Their hopes were dashed, however, when in March 1904, another baby girl was born to them. The couple were staying in Naldara at the time of the birth, and they named their daughter Alexandra Naldara Curzon after the place. Later on Lady Curzon returned to London. In one of the letters that Lord Curzon wrote to her from the summer capital, Simla, he consoled her with these words: 'After all, what does sex matter after we both of us are gone.'

It is possible that these words were merely an attempt on Lord Curzon's part to hide his frustration. Be that as it may adopting such an attitude can solve most of life's problems, if one becomes really conscious of the value of doing so.

Man desires money, offspring and power more than anything in this world, and he does his utmost to acquire them. But if one reflects upon this, finally one is going to leave all these things behind. What is the good of having something which one is bound to lose? If people were only to realize this, they would become content with what they have. It would put a stop to the oppression and cruelty that is perpetrated on this world out of sheer greed.

There is little difference between finding and losing in this world, for no value can be attached to finding something once it is accepted that one is only going to lose it again. How much effort man puts into acquiring wealth in this world; yet the inevitable results of his efforts is that he leaves everything behind. Every life eventually ends in death. When death comes, it tears one away from the things one was most attached to on earth.

People who live for the present, with no thought for the future, think that they can build happy lives for themselves at the expense of others. They seek to ruin others by bringing lawsuits against them in human courts, but it is they themselves who are heading for ruin; it is they themselves who will be tried and condemned in the divine court of the hereafter. They imagine that they can revel in their own glory, having wrought havoc in the lives of others. But they ignore the wellbeing of others at their peril. For soon their material props will vanish into thin air – who in this world is not bound for the grave? – and they will be exposed for the helpless creatures that they really are.

Faith as a discovery

In present times, so-called maps of the solar system have been prepared with great expertise and printed in atlases. No cartographer, however, can prepare a map of this kind which is actually to scale, for if it were to be quite accurate, it should have to be spread out over a page so vast as to be barely imaginable. Consider that the sun is 1,200,000 times bigger than the earth. If the earth were then shown the size of a football, the sun would have to be magnified to the size of 1,200,000 footballs. The same applies to the distance between the sun and its furthest-flung planet. All this is quite beyond the capacity of the cartographer and, at best, an artist could only give his impressions of what these dimensions ought to look like.

Imagine now that you are located at a point in space from which you can see the entire solar system. Before you lies an extraordinary, astounding spectacle: a huge ball of fire – the sun – blazing relentlessly, with about a dozen tiny, dark balls revolving around it in egg-shaped orbits. One would imagine this spectacle to be quite unique, but there are countless spectacles of this nature scattered throughout the universe. And they have but one purpose: to enable man to see the face of his Master reflected in them. Through them, man can come to know his Lord. It is this knowledge of God which, in religious terms, is known as faith.

Faith is a discovery. It is to witness something which lies beyond the veil of the Unseen. Truth is not self-evident. Faith is to feel Truth as though it were so. Such a discovery is a soul-rending experience which causes the seeker to undergo a tremendous upheaval, turning his mind in a new direction, and instilling fresh passion into his heart.

Even a minor discovery can cause great stirrings of the intellect and emotions. Imagine then how much more intense are the feelings attendant upon the discovery of God. The impact of such a discovery is, in effect, too great to be put into words.

Under surveillance

The President of America, the most powerful man in the world, can summon a helicopter by simply touching a button and, more devastatingly, can start a world war by touching another. And yet he himself is the most helpless of men, for the security arrangements at the White House, his official residence, are so tight that he feels sometimes that he is not just being protected, but is actually under surveillance.

One of the young daughters of the previous president complained in her book, *Souvenir*, that she could not carry on a love affair during her stay in the White House as she had no privacy in which to do anything. She had actually made up her mind not to marry while she lived there. She asked the reader to consider the effect of saying good night to a boy at the door in a blaze of floodlight with a secret service man in attendance. 'There is not much you can do except shake hands, and that is no way to get engaged!'. Although anyone living in the White House has a feeling of being watched, no one anticipates the risk of punishment. In spite of this, the people concerned become guarded in their ways. Consider then how a person who has the feeling that he is in the sight of the Almighty every moment of his existence will become guarded in his behaviour.

Islam: In harmony with human nature

What are the things that people live for? Money? Power? Fame? The goals vary with the individual, some being immediate, frivolous, easily interchangeable, while others appear as remote possibilities, difficult of attainment and to be struggled towards over a long period of time, with an unvarying sense of urgency and commitments. In the latter case, whatever the actual goal, and no matter whether it is striven towards in a spirit of egoism or altruism, the whole-hearted dedication of oneself to its attainment is almost like undertaking a religious mission. The man who derives immense satisfaction from the simple fact of having grown a very beautiful rose is no less dedicated than his neighbour who strains every fibre of his being towards becoming a millionaire. The opportunists and profiteers of this world are no less dedicated than the philanthropists who uplift the downtrodden and give generously to the poor. A man's whole life is conditioned by the goal he sets himself. It becomes the pivot of his ideas and emotions, his actions and preoccupations, his dealings with friends, family and, the rest of society. No aspect of a man's life remains unaffected by it, and he clings fast to his 'religion' all the twenty-four hours of the day, be he conscious of this or not.

The point which is missed by so many people nowadays is that whatever our goals in life, whether noble or ignoble, whether selfless or selfish, and whatever the zeal with which we pursue them, our ultimate goal should be to prostrate ourselves before God. No goal should ever be so placed above the beyond religion that the godhead becomes eclipsed. And no matter what kind of religion we choose for ourselves – God-centred, pantheistic or Godless – we should never lose sight of the fact that in this world we are all on trial. There is a common, but erroneous belief that a Godless religion coupled with material success should be the be-all and end-all of existence. But success achieved without God being an all-pervasive factor is a trivial, ephemeral matter, relative only to life on earth, and will not support one into the Life Hereafter. When death finally overtakes a man, all his material possessions and all his worldly successes fall away from him, and he is left alone, and empty-handed, to stand before God, who will arise before him in all His might and majesty. Then will come the moment of trial. And it will avail him little to talk of his worldly prowess at that awesome moment, for honour and success are hollow, worthless concepts when achieved outwith the framework of a God-centered religion. Success gained in this way will condemn one in the life-after-death to eternal failure.

Only God-centred religion is real and in harmony with man's nature. But this truth does not occur to him until the hour of crisis and peril is upon him. A man may have any religion or any material props he chooses, but, in moments of real crisis, it is to God that he calls out for help. Such an experience, which we all go through at one time or another in our lives, is a clear indication that the God-centred religion

is the only true one. As such, it should pervade man's entire existence. Any religion other than this will fail him in his hour of need, in the Hereafter, just as the ordinary everyday means of support so often do in moments of crisis in this world.

Man's experience of today is a pointer to the fate he will encounter in the everlasting world of the Hereafter. Only those who heed the message now, and shape their lives accordingly, will prosper in the world to come.

Skin speech

Man's skin, according to the Qur'an will testify against him on the Day of Judgement:

On the Day when God's opponents are gathered together they will be driven into the Fire. So that when they reach it, their ears, their eyes and their very skins will testify to their deeds. 'Why did you speak against us?' they will say to their skins, and their skins will reply: 'God, who gives speech to all things, has made us speak. It was He who in the beginning created you, and to Him you shall all return. You did not hide yourselves, so that your eyes and ears and skins could not observe you. Yet you thought that God did not know much of what you did. It is this illusion concerning your Lord that has ruined you, so that you are now among the lost (41:19-23).

Until recently the idea of skin being capable of 'speaking' was very difficult for man to understand. Recent progress in scientific research', however, has made it much easier to see how this will happen. A UNI news release, printed in the *Times of India* (May 30, 1984), disclosed this startling discovery:

Skin Speech – communicating through vibrations on the skin offers promise as a future alternative to hearing aids ,or surgical implants for those with impaired hearing, a speech and hearing scientist has said, Dr. Arlene Carney, audiologist at the University of Illinois, said on Monday (May 28, 1984) that 'skin speech' involves the use of tactile devices ,that electronically create speech patterns in vibrations on the skin. Patients receiving the experimental therapy learn to interpret the vibrations and sort them into speech patterns, said Dr. Carney.

It is well-known that words emitted through the mouth are preserved in the atmosphere in the form of sound waves. This sound actually originates in vibrations, much the same as the vibrations that cause skin speech, which are transmitted in the form of wave motions through a material medium such as air. These waves remain in the atmosphere. Though they cannot be seen, they do not disappear. They are there, and, were the apparatus available, can be played back like a tape on which sounds have been recorded.

If this is the case with vibrations that cause sound speech, then it is clearly true of the vibrations that cause skin speech also. These vibrations are also preserved in the atmosphere. Man, who even in this world possesses the ability to play back sounds recorded on a disc or tape, should have no difficulty in understanding this power being extended by God in the next world to cover all vibrations, whether of sound or skin speech, which have been imprinted in the atmosphere in the form of waves.

Man is being tested in this world. No scientific discovery reveals the exact nature of divine truth for, were it to do so, man would have no choice but to accept it: there would be no test involved. However,

advances in the field of science do make it easier for us to understand certain concepts, such as skin speech, which was difficult to fathom in the past. If the fast-accumulating evidence in support of truths expounded in the Qur'an is not sufficient to make man take heed, then he shall have to wait for actual occurrences before he will come to his senses. But then it will be too late; for then there will be no choice but to listen to the evidence of everything – even our skins – and accept the fate to which it condemns us.

You are not poor, you are rich

Even when man is resourceless, he has a great deal to invest. The body and the brain which we possess are beyond all price. If man exploits his capabilities to the full, there is no success which he cannot attain in this world. For him nothing is impossible.

A beggar was calling out for alms on the street. Hearing his call a passerby turned towards him only to find that he was in no way disabled. So he asked how was he entitled to charity. The beggar replied, "I'm poor." The man said, "No you are not." You are, on the contrary, very rich." The beggar pleaded with him not to make fun of him, as he was really poor. The man said again, "All right, give me whatever you have, and in return, I'll pay you Rs. 50,000." The beggar happily handed over to him his dirty bag containing a few coins and said, "That's all I have, you can take it." The man said, "No, you have much more besides this. You have two feet. Give me one of them and I'll pay you Rs. 10,000 in exchange." The beggar refused. Then the man said, "You have got two hands, give me one hand, and I'll pay you Rs. 20,000." The beggar again refused to comply with his request. So the man said, "You have got two eyes, give me one eye and I'll pay you Rs. 20,000." The beggar refused again. The man now said, "Look, you have got two feet, two hands, two eyes. I wanted only one each which together add up to Rs. 50,000. If we set a price on the pairs, it will be one lakh rupees. That means that the price of only three parts of your body is at least one lakh rupees. How can you say you are poor then? You are extremely wealthy. Stop begging, invest this great wealth that God has bestowed on you and you will be reckoned amongst the wealthiest people in the world. God has endowed man with extraordinary capabilities, but, we do not realize their true importance under normal conditions. It is only when we lose anyone of them, then we will learn how priceless it was. Take the case of James Thomas, twenty four years of age and a machine operator by profession. Due to some illness both his kidneys started malfunctioning. He was admitted into the AIIMS, (New Delhi) where doctors told him that the only way to survive was to obtain a kidney from a donor. Now, a kidney is a product of nature which cannot be built in a human factory, even if we were in a position to spend millions and billions of rupees to make one. And even after receiving the priceless gift of a kidney although there were no doctors' or surgery fees, he still needed Rs. 45,000 just to have it transplanted. Here was part of his body which he had never given any particular thought to before, and now its value had been brought home to him in no uncertain manner. (*The Times of India*, 10 January, 1980)

In truth, even when man is resourceless, he has a great deal to invest. The body and the brain which we possess are beyond all price. If man exploits his capabilities to the full, there is no success which he cannot attain in this world. For him nothing is impossible. When you have hands to hold things, when you have feet to walk with, when you have a tongue to speak, really you have all that you want in this world. And because everything else can be obtained by material means, there is nothing that is beyond one's reach.

As clear as day

He said that a qazi should not pass judgement until the truth was 'as clear as day' to him.

It is not only judges who have to decide the rights and wrongs of human affairs, but individuals in all walks of life. Sometimes this is extremely difficult because perhaps not all of the facts are readily available or concerned individuals have suppressed vital information. Sometimes the person who has to settle a dispute is of weak and wavering judgement. What then should be done in such a dilemma? The principle laid down by Abu Musa is perhaps the most helpful in such cases. One of the leading companions of the Prophet, Abu Musa was appointed Governor of Aden during the Prophet's lifetime. Then, during the rule of the second caliph 'Umar, he was given the governorship of Basra. Having held such high and responsible positions in which it was his duty to pass judgements every day, which could have far-reaching consequences, affecting the lives of innumerable individuals, he laid down a principle, which is applicable not only to judges but to every human being. He said that a *qazi* (Judge) should not pass judgement until the truth was 'as clear as day' to him. When this statement was reported to Caliph 'Umar, he heartily endorsed it, saying that this should be the policy of each and every *qazi*.

The dire effects of drinking

A picture published in the *Indian Express* on August 9th, 1986 shows a number of sad-looking individuals with their feet in plaster. Employees of the Chandigarh Fire Service, they had been ordered, while on duty, by Mr. R.K. Ranga, Deputy Commissioner and Director of Fire Services, to jump from the top of a 10 foot high fire engine. In complying with this order, they either broke their feet or were otherwise severely injured.

Mr. Ranga explained that he had ordered them to jump in order to test their physical fitness. The explanation that the firemen gave was that when Mr. Ranga gave this order, he was acting under the influence of alcohol.

It is an accepted fact that drunkenness and crime are closely interrelated. Drinking causes such a degeneration of the mind that one's moral sense remains in abeyance, and there are few improprieties that one stops short of. It has been statistically proved that most road accidents occur due to drinking.

The Encyclopedia Britannica has this to say:

A special offence related to drinking is alcohol-impaired driving of motor vehicles and the resulting high rate of accidents, with fatalities, personal injuries, and property damage. Alcohol, for example, is involved in about one-third of the more than 50,000 annual road traffic fatalities in the United States, in possibly 500,000 injuries to persons, and in more than 1,000,000,000 worth of property damage (1/449).

On November 6, 1985, *The Times of India* published a report entitled, 'Drink Before Crime.' This report underlined the intimate relationship between crime and the consumption of alcohol:

More than half of the jail inmates convicted of violent crimes had been drinking before committing offences, says an official report. In a grim study of alcohol's role in fueling crimes, a report by the U.S. Bureau of Justice showed that, 'altogether, 54 per cent of 32,122 people convicted of violent crimes had been drinking' reports A.P.

It is an indisputable fact that excessive drinking is one of the greatest causes of evil today, for it paralyzes the human capacity to think and feel. It suppresses the voice of conscience which point to what is right and what is wrong, warning man of the consequences of his deeds. What should be the greatest deterrents to the committing of crimes – "a sense of shame, fear of consequences, love of one's fellow-men – are stifled by the state of intoxication which leaves man senseless and without scruples.

That is why, in all revealed scriptures, alcohol is declared unlawful. Even a small quantity of it, which might appear to be harmless, is prohibited, so that man should adopt an attitude of total disgust towards it and treat it as the abomination that it is.